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Talking Points for DCI

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Lebanon

The major crisis confronting the Christians in Lebanon is that they have lost their secure status as the dominant force in Lebanese politics.

- This loss of position did not come recently, but has been underway since at least 1975 when the Lebanese Civil War began in earnest.
- The problem was greatly heightened by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 when the Christians for a while believed that they and the Israelis could put together a new coalition in which they would be restored to dominance. These hopes were crushed by powerful Syrian opposition and the violent opposition of all other elements in Lebanon to the Christian/Israeli plan.
- 1982 also saw the emergence of the Shia as a powerful new player on the scene--possessing a vigor and commitment not seen elsewhere among Lebanon's many sects and confessions.

The Christians still hope that they do not have to submit to any major loss of power under a new power rearrangement in Lebanon. They are currently attempting to unite their forces in a common front against Syria which is seeking to impose a new tripartite political reform plan.

- The Syrians themselves fully recognize the importance and the influence of the Christians in Lebanon. Syria is not even trying to deprive the Christians of a major role in Lebanon; the Syrians in fact see the Christians as central to their vision of a re-oriented Lebanon under Syrian control.
- Syria's main intent is that Lebanon no longer represent an enclave of Western influence and power--and that the Christians not represent an instrument of Israeli power in Lebanon. Syria wants Lebanon to take its place among the Arab ranks where it can be counted in the plus column--or at least not in the minus column--in support of Syrian regional ambitions.

Most Christians--and certainly Gemayel--recognize that they have few options vis-a-vis this aspect of Syrian policy. It is more important to the Christians that they retain a major domestic role vis-a-vis the other

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confessional elements than how Lebanon acts on the international or Arab stage. They will cooperate with Syria in order to retain maximum influence within the country.

Syria will not wish to challenge the Christian position as long as:

- The Christians remain independent of Western or Israeli ties.
- Some kind of redistribution of some power can take place which will reasonably satisfy the Druze, the non-radical Shia, and the Sunni Muslims--thereby bringing some degree of order to Lebanon in which Syria has a relatively free hand in foreign policy.

Given US and Israeli experience in trying to restructure the morass that is Lebanon, there is little reasonable expectation that Syrian control over Lebanon can be broken. It could only be broken by main force Western or Israeli invasion--and even then Syria over the longer run is the only state with the will to stay in Lebanon.

However hostile the Syrians are to most Western interests in the region, their interests in Lebanon coincide to some extent with ours:

- Syria wants order in Lebanon--albeit under Syrian aegis.
- Syria wants a relative balance of forces within Lebanon in which no group is dominant.
- Syria emphatically opposes the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Lebanon--although Syria will tolerate a Hizballah party and some Hizballah activism just to keep its options open with Iran, and to keep a potential handle for use against the Shia Amal organization.

In cold political terms the West's interests in Lebanon right now are rather limited in terms of what can realistically be attained. The human tragedy is immense and the killing goes on. The Christians are no better than many of their rivals in this respect.

- The West's main concern however must be to ensure that the endemic violence in Lebanon not spill out beyond its borders. The struggle for power among the Shia is critical in this regard. If the radical Hizballah attain dominance over the Shia population then "export of the revolution" becomes a sure thing. Violence will spill out of Lebanon into Israel and possibly Western Europe and beyond.

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For better or for worse, Syria is the main force that can help keep the Hizballah at bay. Syria will be even more inclined to do so if and when it breaks its ties with Iran. No one can tell when that break might come.

- Syria in any case will not control, or try to control Hizballah's activities fully anyway. Hizballah will continue to oppose Israel in Lebanon and any major Western role in Lebanon.
- Israel continues to play a major role in helping polarize politics in southern Lebanon and to add to the strength of the Hizballah by radicalizing the population. It is difficult to see how Hizballah is going to grow weaker rather than stronger in the south or any less attentive to organizing the long-term struggle against Israel. Hizballah is helping determine the terms of the Shia political struggle increasingly in terms of an anti-Israeli agenda.